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SCHIEFFER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Bob Schieffer sitting in tonight for Dan Rather. The Reagan administration, which has done little to hide its support of rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista regime, found itself today the defendant in an unusual court case, a case in which the White House vows to ignore the verdict, whatever it may be. Robert Shakne has details.

SHAKNE: Nicaragua filed suit in the International Court of Justice today, the World Court, charging American support for the CIA's covert war violates international law. In Washington, Nicaragua's foreign minister, Miguel D'Escoto, denounced the American decision rejecting World Court jurisdiction. MIGUEL D'ESCOTO (Nicaraguan Foreign Minister): The international community cannot continue to tolerate, for the sake of international peace and security in the world, for a country to, to self-proclaim itself the accuser, the judge and the executioner.

SHAKNE: Even though the United States went before the World Court to gain condemnation of Iran during the hostage crisis, the State Department today held to its position that the United State had a legal right if it wishes to refuse to accept the jurisdiction of the court. JOHN HUGHES (State Department Spokesman): We had a concern that one of the parties might exploit the situation and attempt to use it as a form of propaganda.

SHAKNE: Publicly the United States has not admitted what officials privately concede, that the CIA, using a freighter stationed off shore, directed the mining of Nicaragua's principal seaports of Corinto and Puerto Sandino since February. A number of foreign cargo ships have been damaged. While U.S. aid is supposed to be secret, Congress is still openly debating whether to keep paying for the covert operation, including the support of an army of 18,000 antigovernment guerrillas. The dispute about the mining and the refusal to submit the issue to the World Court raised new questions today in Congress. REP. MICHAEL BARNES (D-Md.): The administration has demonstrated that it knows that its policies can't withstand an inquiry by an impartial, objective, international body. REP. BERKLEY BEDELL (D-Iowa): These elements of President Reagan's Central American policy border on sheer lunacy. The mining of harbors is an act of war. REP. THOMAS P. O'NEILL (Speaker of the House): Up to this point, I have contended the Reagan administration's secret war against Nicaragua has been

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morally indefensible. Today it is clear that it's legally indefensible as well.

SHAKNE: The public outcry about the mining and now the issue of the World Court has put the administration very much on the defensive. One administration official says the new argument may have torpedoed the entire covert operation, that there's a good chance that Congress now will cut off any further money for the not-so-secret war. Robert Shakne, CBS News, Washington.